

# LIMERICK SOCIALIST

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**THE  
VOICE  
OF THE  
WORKER**

'That which is good for the working class I esteem patriotic ...' James Connolly

## ALCAN AND THE 'LEADER'



**Alumina Contractors**

*Limerick Leader*



**MUCH-MALIGNED  
MULTINATIONALS**

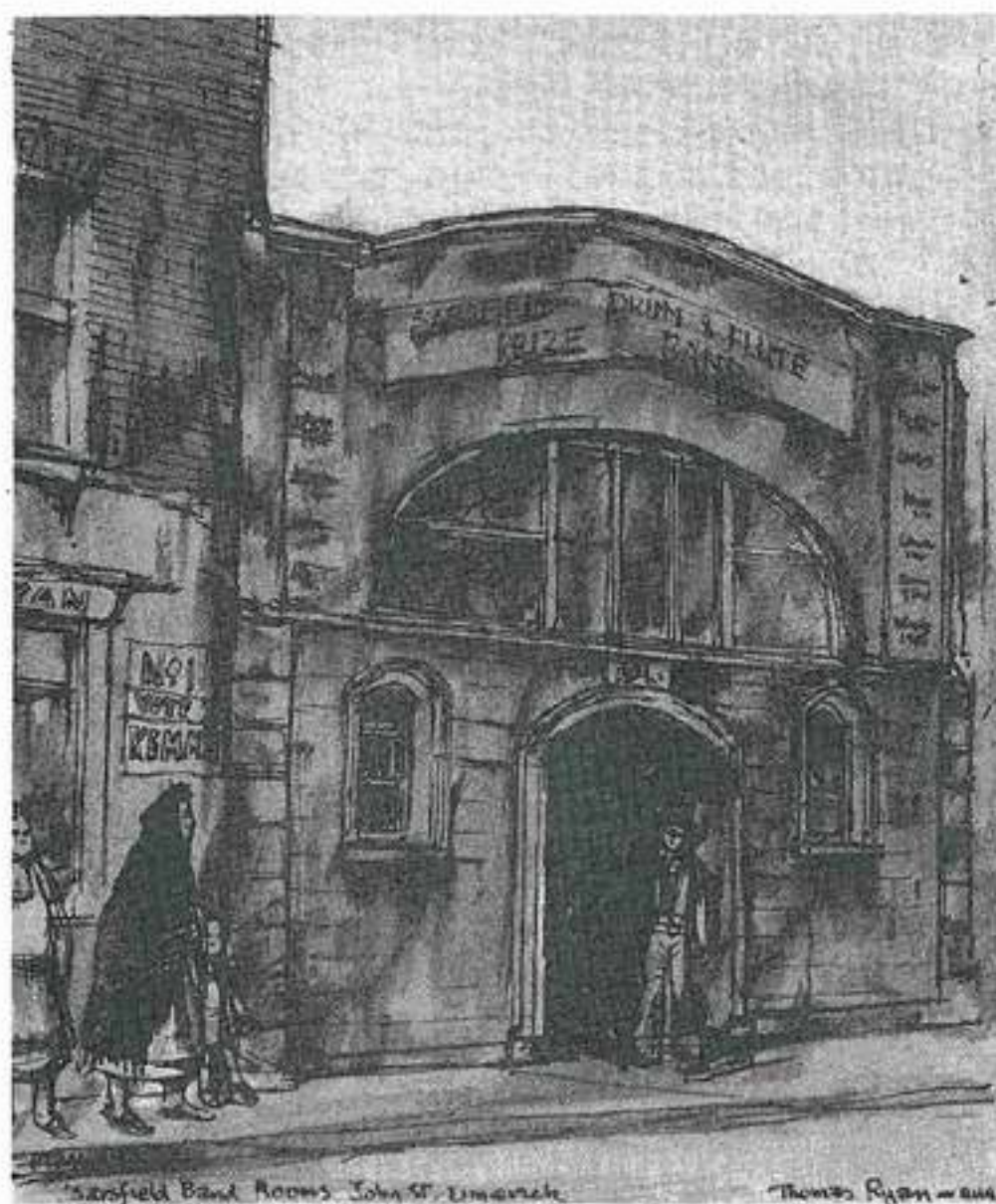
## THE IRISH LANGUAGE



**I nGarraí Eoin**

**le Dónall Mac Amhlaigh**

## THE IRISHTOWN



# A Socialist Notebook

## THE WORKER—PRIEST

I first met the worker-priest at a Chilean solidarity meeting in a small country hotel a month after the coup. He was giving a talk on the fall of Allende and the C.I.A.'s part in destabilising and destroying Chile's Marxist democratically-elected government. As he had no place to stay, I offered to put him up for the night, and for the next year or so he stayed from time to time with me.

He was an unusual man and I never came to understand him, his politics, or his motivation, and I was not alone in this. To me he was a political activist not a priest. He neither prayed nor said Mass nor even bothered attending Mass on Sundays. He wore torn denims winter and summer, talked politics day and night and took up a job as a welder with a construction firm where he was soon in the thick of industrial strife. In those early weeks his nerves were bad, he jumped at sudden noises, was obviously disorientated and agitated, was obsessed with the Chilean situation and grappled for English words to express his thoughts.

He was an Englishman with an Irish father but had lived and worked in Santiago for about five years where he had become deeply involved in politics. He supported the M.I.R., the Movement of the Revolutionary Left, a group to the right of the communists and left of the socialists. These were militarists, sympathetic and allied to the Uruguayan Tupamaros and the Argentinian Montoneros, believing ultimately that the ruling classes could only be brought down with the bomb and the gun. He blamed Allende for weakness, saying that he should have armed the workers and peasants, turned his back on the parliament and rallied the forces of revolution behind him. He himself helped organise militias and was prominent in leading workers in seizing factories and land. Sometimes the military confronted these revolutionary workers and Allende vacillated, trying to placate leftist extremists galloping headlong into revolution and his conservative opponents screaming for his downfall.

The worker-priest was in his late twenties, lean and fit, dark and tall, Stalin-type moustache. Intense, introverted, difficult to talk to, he could gaze out a window for ten minutes without uttering a word. Except for a few exceptions, he showed little interest in women, preferring to talk to husbands than to wives, and no great interest or feeling for children. His interest in European politics extended only in the sphere in which it influenced South American politics, and though he had an interest in the Northern Ireland conflict the absence of a clear class struggle, left him floundering in the same way as it still leaves the majority of the Irish left. After some weeks, he lost the frightened, hunted look and relaxed a little.

He was a Mill Hill priest; had been educated and ordained in Holland; had administered only in Chile and had been greatly influenced by two senior colleagues, a Dutchman and a Frenchman. These had stimulated his political and social development and obviously pushed him into Chilean politics.

While here he worked at a number of jobs doing manual work, and when a number of Chilean refugees came to Galway and Shannon he helped them in every possible way, introducing them to friendly Irish liberals and Socialists, teaching them English, placing them in jobs and smoothing over problems of adjustment. He tried unsuccessfully to gain an audience with the local bishop to get his support. His name and fame had preceded him to the bishop's palace: a priest who didn't say Mass, organised labour, dressed in torn denims, hobnobbed with lefties and worked on construction sites and factories was clearly not the ideal person to share a bottle of claret with.

We all said he'd leave the priesthood and marry. But he did neither. He returned to South America, to Venezuela, to

by  
**William Gallagher**

continue his missionary work. For me he is still an enigma.

## SHARPEN THE SICKLE

Recently I was given a book, *Sharpen the Sickle*, a history of the farm workers' union in Britain. It was first published in 1949 and was written by a man called Reg Graves. It is not very well written; it is uneven, factually weak in places, oral transcripts placed uneasily in the middle of a long narrative account, and chapters coming to abrupt endings. In other words, Graves was not a great writer but the story he tells is good; it is a book that should be read by trade unionists and nationalists who believe that England vented all her anger on Ireland's peasantry.

The conditions of the English farm workers were more or less the same as those of the Irish servant boys and girls throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century. About 1935, the English squires, parsons and farmers accepted that the farm workers' unions had come to stay and they would have to learn to live with the fact. This was more than a hundred years after Tolpuddle, when nine farm workers were hanged, 500 transported to Van Diemen's Land and 400 imprisoned, all because they had tried to found a union.

This book tells how these unions were finally established and of the anonymous men and women, many of them illiterate, poor, risking all they had for the cause; there are also the famous names Joseph Arch and George Edwards and the not so famous people like the Burston teachers, Tom and Mrs. Higdon. Final credit goes to the farm workers but they received valuable assistance from non-conformist preachers, school teachers, liberal journalists, small shopkeepers and others who, recognizing how badly the labourers were exploited, came out on their side. It was a straight class struggle with the gentry, the big farmer and usually the parson on the other side. Workers were locked out, evicted, starved into submission, jailed and spirited away by the unions to Australia and elsewhere when a particular battle was lost.

The period saw the decline of the Liberal Party and the rise of the Labour Party, with its new doctrine of socialism to which Methodists and other non-conformists were attracted. For the British workers it was a period of optimism and hope, and indeed the dawn was approaching and the British worker was to see himself and his family emerge to take their first steps towards their rightful place in the sun as the primary producers of the nations wealth.

## LEFT WING FASCISM

An old and dear friend of mine in my younger days often lectured us about the fascist left. Most of us at the time considered this just a lot of old high tory nonsense, as there wasn't very much left not to mind fascist left around at the time. We all knew of the fascist right, of course. In a recent article in this paper a left wing fascist element was identified in Sinn Fein the Workers' Party, and many people are agreed that these people have fascistic tendencies. In some ways it is understandable that we should breed these political types: there is a heavy strain of intolerance in our educational, religious and cultural background.

A fascist is someone who has all the answers for himself and everyone else. He doesn't have the questions and doesn't ask questions. The reason that O'Duffy failed owed more to the

lingering, hatreds of the Civil War and O'Duffy's ineptitude as a leader than to any deep-seated hostility towards the doctrine's basic concepts. But be that as it may.

It is the obligation of every thinking man to take stock occasionally and examine his political stance and position. There was a time when politics could be seen in simple terms: left and right, good and bad, right and wrong party. This has changed through the years. Like most things in life politics has shades of grey. The young are often hysterical in their politics. This hysteria is only a cover for an absence of solid beliefs and conviction and the hysterical radicals of today become the conservatives of tomorrow. But sometimes this hysteria is lifelong: the mad Fianna Failers, the wild left, the ignorant right winger with his hunger for discipline and military power.

One has to be on guard against the natural tendency is to move away from them, to gravitate towards the centre where one can sit and talk to liberal centrists, with whose politics one may not necessarily agree but whose culture and company one admires. But no matter how much one learns to prize cultured, civilized conversation something more than mere talk is needed to build a strong socialist party.

One of the problems of the zealots of S.F.W.P. is that they lack the broad liberal kind of education. They are blind undemocratic mullahs, led by one-eyed Ayatollahs.

#### BISHOP NEWMAN

Recently I read in a Sunday paper a report of a speech given by Bishop Newman to Irish-Americans. The bishop was reported as warning them and the American politicians of the volume of Marxist analyses on the situation in Northern Ireland. Why should the bishop resent this? We've had

republican analyses, Tory analysis, various Fianna Fail solutions, Labourite-Fine Gaelite policies, books, articles and interviews from the Roman Catholic side, whose principal spokesman is bishop Cathal Daly. The Protestants, and Unionists also have their theoreticians. Surely a Marxist analysis is in order.

The bishop was reported as saying that he looked to the Americans for a more active involvement and interest. They certainly bring peace and solutions to the trouble-spots of the world: Korea, Vietnam, Angola, Ethiopia, Chile, Uruguay, Honduras, Guatemala, Iran etc. etc. We can certainly do without this kind of American "solution" to the Northern Ireland conflict.

There is a major omission in Bishop Newman's speech: he failed to show how the Marxist analysis is incorrect and contrary to the principles of democracy.

It is a measure of the bishop's concern that he chose to address his remarks to Irish-Americans, a section notorious for their financial and vocal support for the Provos.

The most tenacious Marxist analysis to emerge in the past decade has been the two-nations theory, or the right of the Northern Ireland Protestants to opt for the state of their own choosing. And it is the increasing acceptance of this analysis, especially amongst workers and socialists in Ireland and Britain, that is causing Dr. Newman to worry. Given this context, the bishop's remarks are not too difficult to explain. After all, it is not so long ago since he gave the Provos' bombing and shooting campaign his imprimatur by supporting their call for the withdrawal of the British Army. But this call got little public support, whereas the Marxist analysis continues to gain strength. Hence the forlorn appeal to America to pick up the Northern Ireland burden.

# SOCIALIST LABOUR PARTY

Dr. Noel Browne's decision to cease representing the Socialist Labour Party in Dail Eireann has placed a question-mark over the future of that party, whose formation owed so much to his prestige.

Many other SLP members and sympathisers must be reviewing their position in the light of the publicity given to remarks made at the party's recent conference. At this gathering several speakers, including the Party's President, Mr. Merrigan, declared support in varying degrees for the Provisional I.R.A. Mr. Merrigan has since withdrawn his remarks, but even in his case, the attitude to the I.R.A. is by no means clear. This is not surprising given the evasions in the conference resolution, which opposed "anti-civilian bombings" (but not other Provo activities), and stated: "we understand the decision of the Provos and others to take up arms".

To see what is meant by "understanding" the Provos, we

must look at the SLP policy document on "The National Question", which calls for "immediate withdrawal of British troops". This document makes it clear that the SLP denies the right of the majority in Northern Ireland to remain citizens of the United Kingdom, and is not opposed to the use of force to get them into a united Ireland. In that context, it is hardly surprising that statements of support for the Provos were made at the SLP conference.

A discussion on the Provos' "military tactics" (which are criticised in the policy document), or on whether Mr. Merrigan used the correct form of words, is a pointless one. The fundamental question is whether socialists support the imposition of a united Ireland on the population of Northern Ireland. Socialists Against Nationalism believe that the anti-partitionist campaigns (political and military) have not only failed to achieve their aims, but have worsened the position of the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland; have disrupted any possibility of united working class politics in Northern Ireland; have retarded working class politics in the Republic; as well as causing thousands of futile injuries and deaths (and at times presenting the threat of a full scale civil war). We believe that socialists must accept the present state boundaries in Ireland, and oppose the demand for the British government to declare its intent to withdraw from Northern Ireland.

Those SLP members who disagree with their party's nationalist policy have presumably been heard at the conference; apart from Dr. Browne, they have not made themselves heard by the public. We believe that many people interested in socialism would be interested in a public debate on these issues. Accordingly, we have invited the SLP to debate in public with speakers from Socialists Against Nationalism, on the theme: "Should socialists work for a united Ireland?"

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# Up and down the Irishtown

PART TWO

*Our Boys* was a publication few lads would deny themselves, no matter whose money paid for it. The ghost stories of Kitty the Hare, the travelling woman of Munster, would turn your blood to water. There were no lies in these tales or else the Brothers were liars. The Brothers had tales of their own, too, some of which put Kitty to the pin of her collar. For that matter didn't priests sometimes make the hair stand on your head with their stories such as the one about the drunk that fell asleep in the confessional and woke up to hear a voice saying softly and sadly: "Is there anyone here who'll say Mass for me?"

'Twas after midnight and all the church doors were locked and bolted. A priest stood outside the box staring straight in at him. He was staring straight out at the priest and through him at the pillar behind. He knew then 'twas a ghost and the fright of death was in his bones, but the priest looked so sorrowful and spoke so sadly to him that he got the courage of fear and said, "I will".

When Mass was ended the good man's face shone with joy; now he could leave Purgatory and go to Heaven, his debt paid to the woman who years before had given him money to say Mass in repose of her husband's soul.

The story had brought a hushed silence to the schoolroom, but soon Chiselface was shouting, "Stop that racket". Bad news had reached us: there was no *Our Boys* this week.

The parcel of books lay open before the Brother; he picked one up and glared at the cover. "Michael Collins"! He angrily slammed down the book on the desk. This action caused no surprise in the classroom where he likened De Valera to Jesus Christ. Dev got the same treatment: palms under his feet, crown of thorns and all.

But what about Kitty the Hare? How were we to know what had happened to her after she had fallen down the well when her dead uncle appeared to her?

Handball, hurling and Gaelic football were considered the only games fit for an Irish boy or man to play. Soccer and rugby were decadent enemy games . . . no decent Irish lad should ever think of playing them. But still there was talk of playing them, quiet, soft talk. What started as a seditious whisper soon grew to wide open rebellion.

The talk was loud enough to reach the black bosses' ears. The words "treason" and "heresy" were invoked. By God, he'd sort this out. "Hands up all those in favour of rugby. Hands up all who want hurling. All in favour of rugby line up outside the class". Seventy-five per cent of the pupils were punished for their disloyalty to Ireland with four of the best to each boy.

John Street School was noted chiefly for its output of messenger boys; the few lucky ones moved on to Sexton Street School where they faced a hostile reception and an atmosphere of suspicion. The label of downtown toughs and rougns put masters on the defensive. Someone or other who was no damn fool once said that defence was the best form of degence. This maxim was speedily and effectively put into practice. Punishment was severe even for trivial offences.

Boys of high intelligence and plodders gifted with the ability to absorb scorn, fists and leather came through. Sons of business and professional people were outrageously favoured; for one thing their school money was regularly paid; school cap and bone collar were always in evidence and clean; books, pens, pencils and all the rest of the school truck stood in place to please and charm the eyes of Brother Derupulous. All in all, they were children of responsibility, far removed from the liability of beggars.

Individuality was a sin; neurosis a downright crime; imagination a carnal thing, particularly when applied to religion and history — Irish history. Brave the scholar who dared to doubt or question the written word when backed by the master's tongue.

*by John Bennis*

The dreaded Friday examination came. Fear and silence hung over the classroom; the fear was so strong you could smell it. Brother Scrapulous, catfooting between the desks, kept a sharp lookout for cogging. The pressure and tension of the examination became to tell: bloody pencil top gone again . . . pairing with a blade . . . thumb nick . . . suck it . . . but can't suck the sums.

There was an old brother named Tully who was both a beast and a bully. Bang! Below the right eye the fist struck. Through the haze of pain the voice of the loving one thundered: "What kind of an exercise is that?", he said, pointing to the blood-blobs. "Go down to the sink and wash your filthy hands, and when you come back, start on a new page". With the returning wits came relief. For one terrible moment you thought he had read your vengeful mind.

At dinner-time mother passed. "Why aren't you eating your food?", she asked. The names Sulphy and Savage came bitterly to mind. You weren't going back to school. Goodbye to the Christian Brothers and hello to Broderick's Academy for Young Gentlemen. One bright feature of this establishment was that it had not the hated Sunday class, so there was no more lyrical lying to get off the hook.

On Sunday morning the kitchen bristled with fishing rods and the good men who wielded them: Tom Walsh, tall, thin and incredibly soft-spoken; Paddy Ryan, Cistercian monk to be; Pat McConkey, hunchback tailor, devoid, of ill-humour; Pa Barrett, great talker and enchanting liar.

The bell for ten o'clock Mass rang out and the sun was cracking the flags. Mother bustled about, frying and making sandwiches. "Will ye have enough there, Martin, for the two of ye?" "Shove in another couple, Muh. He was eating his breakfast and taking his time. Words were flying: "God help the fish today". "Tis true for you, Mrs. Mack. What we don't catch we'll drive mad". "Is it a bull you're having for breakfast? If you eat any more you won't be able to walk up Plassey Bank". Arra hould your whisht, Pa; a dead man is good to no-one, as the priest said to the bishop, when chided for eating an egg on Good Friday.

"By the way, Muh, did I tell you I'm getting a rise in me wages?" "No, you did not. How'd you manage it". "I asked the boss yesterday and he said if I give you a rise in your wages I'll have all the other boys around me neck". "And what did you say to that?" Pa wanted to know. "I told him I'd give him my word I wouldn't tell anyone". "I'll bet", said Mother, "he had a quare answer to that". "Oh, he had", he said. "Who ever heard of a word between an employer and an employee".

Mother was waiting. She knew her son. "I said there is such a thing as a word between two gentlemen".

They were happy, secure days, but every box of ointment has its fly. "Look out now, boys, . . . 'Tis alright, her door is shut. She mustn't be up yet, or else she's gone to Mass. Thank God, she's a proper magpie". "Lord yes. The last time we met Moll Barton we hadn't an hour's luck all day". "Tis true for you: there's nothing but bad luck and misfortune when a red-haired woman crosses your path in the morning".

To the Mulcaire river they would go to a spot some distance upstream from the Black Pipes; the Horse's Hole they called it. It was a funny sort of name to give a place till you remembered the Lady's Hole in the canal and the Drummer's Hole near the Shannon Fields. The Lady's Hole was a small, scummy pond at the exit end of a culvert, easing out excess



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water from behind the flood-gates.

You were happy there . . . no strong feelings, just happy to be where everything was different from town things, with no one ordering you about just . . . "Any chance you'd fill the kettle" or "Would you ever get a few sticks for the fire". No "you must" or "You have to" or "be quick". The time lazily passed watching your handline, hearing snatches of men's talk about rods and baits . . . "Too bright for fly fishing" . . . "want a good cross wind". Sometimes the talk drifted to girls and women.

Dusk brought a special seriousness to the fishing and a magic and mystery to the growing sounds and smells of the river. The day was never too long and there was always the pang of pain when the time came to leave for home.

But however late the hour the little shop in Sullivan's Bow would be open. Behind the counter was an oasis of lemonade and ice cream. Aunt Madgy teased: "Would you have time to stand for a child". "Could you back-stitch a bottle or hem a griddle?" She eagerly watched your face as she popped strange things into her mouth.

But however long and happy Sunday is Monday comes. It was time for school again. Fair play to Dinny Broderick; he did his best with tongue and came impartially. He had no pets and no pimps. "Open your mouth and spit it out; don't be afraid of it, man. To the budding scholar stumbling over *Gulius Caesar* or *Gray Elegy* his purr of pleasure was sweet music. And the dig in the back that almost sent you to your knees was praise indeed.

When he was angry he'd rise up on his toes, thick cane rigid in his hands. "I'll dust you down . . . I'll come down on you

like a ton of bricks . . . You'll be found in the gutter one of these days". He gave of his best, any fool could see that but the material was red raw from alley, tenement, lane and hovel — the products of poverty, apathy and drunkenness, warped and maimed before life began. The thousand years of ignorance and superstition dragged like a ball and chain at will, thought and endeavour.

The other masters did their best, too. They were all good men, honest of purpose. Only once did one of them blot his copybook. Beefy Moloney took to the meed which was natural if not proper for a boy climbing to fifteen. That Cock Shaughnessy should catch him puffing a butt in the lavatory — was merely an accidental piece of bad luck — for Cock. Beefy was duly thrashed and the story should have ended there. Alas, Beefy could never suffer fools gladly. At the foot of the stairs leading to the master's class lay a boot-scraper well past its prime, with a hole in its middle.

Slipping out of class while his enemy was busy with exercises, Beefy set the mat against the floor and the first step of the stairs. A messenger was dispatched to inform Mr. Shaughnessy that he was wanted at the front door. The stairway was dark by virtue of a wall scarcely two feet from the stairs. Cock pushed his glasses up on his forehead, left the class and went down the stairs to meet the caller.

Everyone knew the poor man was fond of a drink. Cock's tumble was Beefy's triumph. The other masters shook the heads at the broken glasses and cut forehead. The Irish master was heard to say quite savagely: "That infernal public house across the road should be closed down during school hours!"

(To be continued)

# ALCAN AND THE 'LEADER'

It could never be said of the leading articles of the *Limerick Leader* that they are written by office boys for office boys. The average, self-respecting office boy would certainly have a more open, consistent and, above all, livelier outlook than any of the paper's editorial writers. Indeed, it could well be said that the *Leader's* editorials invariably give the impression that they are exclusively written by crusty, ultra-conservative and superannuated scribes for retired Reverend Mothers and tight-laced maiden aunts.

But studying the paper's leading articles has a fascination all of its own. For all the *Leader's* stock-in-trade of old-fashioned values and high moral rectitude its consistency is far from impeccable. The fascination comes in when one finds the paper up an editorial *cul-de-sac* and with no principled way out but to admit its mistaken policy. But the *Leader* has its own way of doing these things. On these occasions principles, moral rectitude and the old-fashioned values take a back seat. With all the ease of a modern automatic car, the paper pauses and then smoothly reverses its long-held editorial line.

A typical and recent about-face by the *Leader* is its attitude to the Alcan project at Aughinish Island, Co. Limerick. Since the go-ahead for the industry was given last year after a four-year hold-up, the paper has been falling over itself in giving front page coverage to the venture. Favourable news items, pictures, reports and interviews have jostled with one another in the paper's pages in creating the impression that the *Leader* has always supported the coming of Alcan. But such is far from being the case.

The *Limerick Leader's* campaign against Alcan was determined, dirty and total in its opposition. In early 1972, following the announcement by the company of its plans to establish an alumina plant near Foynes, the paper went on the offensive in a series of articles – and emerged as the leading Irish critic of Alcan. The journalists and printing workers employed by the *Leader* appeared to go along with this criticism as not one of them is on record as having opposed it.

On March 16th 1974, the general manager of the paper, Jim Kelly, in his weekly "Spartacus" column wrote:

“To get the Alcan project off the ground will cost the taxpayers many millions and ... it also carries with it the threat of pollution no matter how the bad effects of its waste products may be reduced or controlled. We must be a very stupid nation if we are not willing to learn from the destruction of the environment that has resulted from the proliferation of "dirty" industries in other countries ... There is still time for us to change direction and to let the commonsense take precedence over the search for the mighty dollar that comes with the horror of pollution and disease. Let us save such projects as Holly Park before we rush headlong into the type of industrialisation that no country wants. Why should we become the cesspit of the world – something that might suit the rest of the world, certainly – for the sake of money? After all, the quality of life is not entirely dependent on money and what money can buy. . . .”

In a "Page One Comment" in the same issue the *Leader* put another boot into Alcan:

“..... Absentee industrialists – the modern version of landlords of another age – can profit at the expense of the Irish taxpayer by establishing State-subsidised industries which are clearly out of character with the Irish scene.”

## 'LEADER'

When Alcan announced the postponement of the industry later in 1974 the *Leader* did nothing to conceal its delight. In the four year period before the project got under way the paper's line underwent a dramatic change. It had become obvious to even the *Leader* that public opinion was fully behind the new industry. The high unemployment situation existing in the Limerick area may also have impinged on the *Leader's* consciousness.

Without any attempt whatsoever to explain its change of policy to its readers, the paper began to churn out vast amounts of free publicity on Alcan. Not a squeak of criticism escaped from the paper and no mention of conservation or cesspits appeared on the horizon this time around.

All this might be considered bad enough but the *Leader* was far from finished: history had to be re-written. In a leading article in its edition of January 27, 1979, titled, "Much-Maligned Multinationals", the writer stated:

“WE TOLD YOU SO, crow the prophets of leftist extremism whenever disaster strikes a multinational industry. Big business, according to the gospel of communism, is to blame for everything.”

Obviously, the wider variety of enterprises, the less vulnerable is the community generally in the face of commercial shifts outside its control. But the right mix cannot be obtained without the global giants. Native industry will never be capable of providing all the money, the markets and the know-how needed to ensure prosperity.

Multinationals, like locally-owned firms and State-sponsored conglomerates, are not without sin. But, contrary to marxist propaganda, Ireland's vastly-experienced Mid-West can truthfully testify that, almost without exception, they act with the utmost respect for the traditional culture, the natural environment and, above all, the plain people of the areas in which they operate. Certainly their proven virtues far outweigh their imagined vices.”

Naturally enough, the editorial said nothing about the paper's bitter opposition to Alcan, the biggest multinational project undertaken in the Mid-West region or in the whole country. Not only that, but the paper now attempts to cast "the prophets of leftist extremism" in the role filled by itself. This reversal of roles by the paper becomes doubly ironic when it is realised that it was the *Limerick Socialist* not only welcomed the Alcan project but, in a two-page article of April 1974, laid bare the false basis of the *Leader's* opposition. The *Socialist* stated.

“And what about the question of pollution? The "Leader" itself is contributing more to mental

pollution in Limerick by all the bullshit it continues to churn out weekly. Its whole campaign against Alcan falls into that category.

And what of the pollution of human poverty in West Limerick? The "Leader" has never concerned itself with this topic, even when 25% of the people of many parishes in the area were being forced into emigration by economic hardship.

The truth of the matter is that most Limerick people had never even heard of Auginish Island before the Alcan announcement. The campaign of the "Leader" against Alcan has been based on hypocrisy and deception and does not stand up to any kind of close scrutiny.

The attempt to oppose Alcan on a local or national basis is a narrow, backward step. Multi-national companies can only be confronted by the organisation of workers on an international scale. There is also the further consideration that the industrialisation of the country increases the numbers and strength of the Irish working class and hastens the day when workers can use their increased strength to bring about a socialist society.

The nostalgic yearning of the "Leader" for industries "suitable to the environment of rural Ireland" has nothing to offer to the Irish people, especially workers. The paper's efforts to turn back the clock to the era of protectionism — the era of small industries and small wages, when it was common for twenty or more labourers to queue up for the privilege of driving a wheelbarrow for meagre wages in de Valera's idyllic Republic — have no basis in economic reality. Irish capitalism has entered the main-stream of international capitalism, leaving the "Leader" like King Canute on the shore of the Shannon Estuary mouthing hypocritical clichés about pollution.

The leftist prophets were also proved right when it came to predicting the staying power of the Leader in maintaining its opposition to the "cesspit" plant:

“ But how sincere is the "Leader" behind all this outraged rhetoric? . . . . . And how far is the paper prepared to go in its opposition to the "absentee industrialists" of Alcan? As far as the first advertisements to be placed by that company in the yawning columns of the "Leader". And when this situation arrives there will be no references to "cesspits" and "landlords" in the columns of the paper. ”

So, far from opposing the Alcan industry, the leftist prophets led the way in dealing with the multinational. Later the Limerick Council of Trade Unions followed on in adopting this policy. But you are unlikely to find any of these facts in the leading articles of the Limerick Leader.

## *First Song of the Old Peasant*

Down in the village,  
among the men,  
she walks with the pride  
of a rich man's bride  
and the smile of a child of ten.

And she is not yet married.  
She wears no wedding ring.  
And I can see  
by the swing of her knee  
she's not such a shy young thing.

She lives with her elder brother  
who looks a difficult man;  
he's warty and thin,  
has leathery skin  
and the face of a wizened ram.

She goes to Church on Sundays,  
to the general Store each day;  
she takes her walk,  
before it's dark,  
down past the right-of-way.

She's not the kind for Convents,  
of that I'm spitting sure;  
I can tell with the best,  
by the tilt of her breast,  
when she's crossing the watching square.

I've watched her now for a long time;  
watched with the eye of a snipe;  
and now that she's all  
a man wants in a girl  
I think my time is ripe.

The trees this Spring are greener,  
my blood has much more fire  
and I can feel,  
on my thighs like an eel,  
the long lick of desire.

*Desmond O'Grady*

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

# THE IRISH LANGUAGE

On January 30th, in his weekly *Irish Press* column, Donall MacAmhlaigh wrote a long article generously praising the *Limerick Socialist*. It is not surprising that Mr. Mac Amhlaigh was impressed by the *Socialist*: the paper has a sturdiness of style and a backbone of common sense characteristic of much of Mac Amhlaigh's own writing and thinking.

Donall Mac Amhlaigh is no flash in the pan writer. For the past twenty-five years his output in the Irish and English languages has been considerable. And in the same period he has also laboured as a building worker in Britain. In his writings and in his life he has shown himself to be a decent man with humane political principles. (An exception to this rule has been his attitude to the Northern Ireland conflict when his normal clear-headedness has invariably been clouded by the emotional sentimentality of Catholic nationalism and coloured by the current Connolly Association line).

But his recent column is not totally uncritical: he does not approve of my *Socialist Notebook* statement that "De Valera had visions of lumpy, red-cheeked girls dancing reels on flagged floors of thatched cottages and babbling innocent nonsense to each other in Gaelic". Mr. Mac Amhlaigh sees this reference as an expression of English provincialism and wonders if this represents hostility towards the Irish language.

The question gives me an opportunity to state my position. I am not opposed to the Irish language or indeed to any other language. To be hostile to a language means that one is hostile to a people and their culture. Such an attitude is, of course, an ignorant one. A person may dislike a language, a literary development in prose or poetry and particular types of music but to try to impose this dislike as part of a political philosophy is backward, undemocratic and ultimately guaranteed to fail.

I agree with the individual's right to speak Irish, and I read and speak it with moderate fluency myself. I also agree with Donall Mac Amhlaigh: there is a richness in Irish which has no equivalent in the spoken English of Ireland. This is frequently demonstrated when English speakers in the culturally Gaelicized parts of the country, the sea folk and the mountain folk of the West, fall back on Irish for cultural nuances for which there are no exact English words or phrases. And there are still a large number of Gaelicisms found in districts where Irish has not been the dominant tongue for a hundred years.

No, my opposition is not to Irish but to knavery: to the manner in which the language has been used as a political football. Fianna Fail has used of the language to garner votes, pretending on the one hand to be the people's party guarding their cultural heritage, while at the same time secretly abandoning Gaelic and transforming the society into a modern capitalist state, which the country now is.

But the Fianna Fail leaders still throw out their favourite hypocritical phrase at the chapel gates, "A chairde Gaeil". Deceit and dishonesty have characterised the language policies of successive governments. Irish has been used as a step-ladder to political power, and if widespread cynicism has resulted among the people, one cannot blame the cynics.

In the same way the language has been used as an obstacle fence in employment. A post as a primary teacher or civil servant was until very recently impossible without a high degree of fluency. Civil service and academic rules stipulated fluency in the language for jobs in which it would never be required. Final year medical students in University College Galway had to pass an oral Irish examination to qualify, even though the vast majority would never have to use it in their subsequent working lives. Specialist posts in the civil service were often filled by second-rate people because highly qualified non-Irish speakers were ineligible. (But this policy could not survive forever. Recently the Department of Transport and Power waived the Irish language qualification when employing two foreign-geologists).

Then there is the indisputable fact that children born in the

more Anglicized counties were discriminated against by their place of birth. It is obvious that the Gaelic language does not come as easily to children growing up in Limerick or Dublin as it does to children born in the Irish-speaking parts of Kerry, Galway and Donegal.

Irish language revivalists up to now—allowing them an honesty which many of them did not possess—were ignorant and uninformed in their methods and totally unclear as to their eventual aim. Some spoke about the need to replace English with Irish. This hairbrained scheme is about as imaginable as Ian Paisley being elected Pope.

If, as Donall Mac Amhlaigh correctly states, the Gaeltachtaí are being whittled away and English is supplanting Irish on a district by district basis, don't blame the socialists. We have never had a voice in the shaping, making and implementation of Irish language policies. If the revival of the language has not succeeded, the blame lies squarely on successive governments, the civil service and the boorish revivalists who turned people off. Many of the boors were to be found in Conradh na Gaeilge, were often teachers, were fervent Roman Catholics, voted Fianna Fail and were the local pillars of the G.A.A. All of this could be quite understandable were it not that these same people believed that they had some kind of divine right to ram their narrow values down the throat of everyone else and that those who rejected them were West Britons, shoneens, non-Irish and traitors.

If the ordinary people have been subjected to a fifty year process of bribery, bullying and dishonesty they can hardly be blamed for disliking the cause for which all this was done. The remarkable thing is that, in the face of this terrible history, so many more people don't dislike the language. Gaelic, with its culture and music, are held dear by a remarkable number of people. Many of these people do not live in the Gaeltachtaí but in different parts of the country. Unlike the people of the Gaeltacht, they have not been paid to preserve their culture. Theirs is an Anglo-Irish culture. They speak an English laced with Gaelic idioms and words, enjoy traditional music and dances and their cultural background is still recognizably Irish. They have never received grants or doles or taken the shilling to speak the language.

Donall Mac Amhlaigh knows these cultural communities in such places as Sliabh Luachra, Sliabh Rua and Sliabh Gua. On the other hand there are many homes in the Gaeltacht where Irish is spoken during the summer for the students and English during the winter. One can't blame the people of the Gaeltachtaí; they were often poor and needed the money, and the English language is considered a valuable asset by the people of the Gaeltacht. But one can't go on forever paying a people for speaking a language or preserving a culture without taking away their respect for the language and themselves.

The people have had enough of the professional Irish speakers like Donal O Morain and Liam O Murchu pumping chauvinism and backward provincialism into the mainstream arteries of the country. The people have shown that they want Irish but only on their own terms.

We are the inheritors of two distinct traditions. We are, as Joyce said, a hyphenated race and it is from the marrying of the two that a new flowering will come. There are young poets and writers working in Irish today who have done more to bring people to the language than a studio of O Murchu's, assorted cardinals, bishops, politicians Civil Servants and crawthumpers. They are young men and women of culture, vision and understanding. Donall Mac Amhlaigh, from his Northampton base, has done more than his share. Which is more than can be said of many better placed people. And to come back to De Valera. Isn't it about time that some one called attention to the gap between his visions and dreams and the reality of his educational and social policies?

WILLIAM GALLAGHER